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ABSTRACT

After examining major concerns that have been developing in many schools and communities with regard to elective English programs, this paper notes the need for a "second generation" of English programs that will incorporate the successful features of electives yet will seek solutions to the obvious problems. It outlines a model curriculum based on providing activities related to five stages of young people's growth in English, as described by G. Robert Carlsen. Each of the stages is discussed; for each stage, possible reading and composition activities are suggested, along with topical areas on which clusters of units, topics, and electives may be based. The paper also discusses processes that may be used in developing an English curriculum based on students' interests and needs and provides a checklist of considerations for curriculum planning and design. (GW)

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THE INKWELL* 7

COURSE PLANNING and DESIGN

The honeymoon with elective programs seems to be over. In the past ten years electives have swept the country, and both teachers and students have been very happy with them; yet, increasing numbers of teachers, students, and even parents have begun to develop some serious reservations about electives--and it seems clear to everyone that elective English is not a cure-all for the problems English teachers face. Although not all INKWELL readers are involved with elective programs, we will begin the issue with a discussion of this popular curriculum design.

What has made elective English so popular? Perhaps it can be most easily summed up by saying that electives have a liberating effect on the curriculum: Electives freed teachers to pursue their own interests and develop new syllabi and course descriptions, rather than following set patterns; and electives offered young people a choice, which, in turn, helped to increase their interest in English. Without exaggeration, we can say that electives have probably been the most significant component of the revolution in English teaching. Further, because English teachers pioneered in the use of elective programs, in many communities, the English faculties have established themselves as curriculum leaders to whom other departments look for ideas.

So what's the trouble with electives? We see three concerns developing in many schools and communities:

First, elective programs frequently lack a meaningful structure or design. A few years back we were guilty of recommending that a high school faculty develop its new elective program by simply circulating a sign-up sheet: "Who wants to teach what?" Although this "technique" sometimes develops a reasonable balance of course offerings, the fact is that in many schools merely having teachers sign up for "favorites" produced a hodge-podge of unrelated courses listed under the general framework of "English." While student learning--a great deal of learning--can take place under this scheme, it reduces the possibility for coherence in the program and thus lessens the opportunity for systematic learning in English.

Few teachers want to return to the "old" English curriculum with "sequenced" courses like English I, II, III, and IV,

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or Introduction to Literature, American Literature, British Literature, World Literature, where "continuity" consisted, as often as not, of lists of grammar skills and a hierarchy of literary names and concepts. Nevertheless it seems clear that English departments need to talk about their rationales, aims, and goals more systematically than they do under many elective programs.

A second problem centers on the issue of whether or not electives actually "meet student needs" any more successfully than did the traditional common course. In ALTERNATIVES IN ENGLISH: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF ELECTIVE PROGRAMS (National Council of Teachers of English and ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communications Skills, 1972), George Hillocks points out that all too frequently courses are patterned after teacher interests rather than student needs, a product of the "who wants to teach what" phenomenon described above. For example, though students express strong preference for thematic courses and free reading programs, the most frequently offered courses are those which deal with genres--poetry, drama, fiction--or classic authors, especially Shakespeare. While vaguely expressed student "wishes" shouldn't be the origin of the entire English curriculum, it seems that elective programs should pay more attention to student needs than they do at the moment.

Further, it is apparent that in many schools, student needs are not being considered within courses themselves. Thus, a young friend of ours recently signed up for a course appealingly entitled Supernatural Literature only to discover that the teacher had planned a program centered on the eighteenth century gothic novels of Horace Walpole--pretty dull stuff even for scholars. When the young person objected, he was told that there was "no room" in the course for a person who didn't want to read the prescribed novels. Clearly this elective course was teacher-dominated, with minimal concern for the needs, interests, and abilities of the kids. A choice had been offered, love it or leave it.

Of course, the problem of meeting student needs cuts two ways. Another teacher we know--bright, energetic, concerned--told us recently: "I set up the best Science Fiction course I could. Lots of reading options. Many good projects. I told the kids that I wanted them to work out their own set of reading materials and writing projects. But all they want to do is sit around and rap about sex." Thus even "relevant" courses, calculated to meet kids' needs, aren't always successful. Again, electives aren't a cure-all for motivational problems, even after students have selected courses which they think will be of interest.

The third problem involves the fact that increasingly the general public is suspicious of what goes on (and what doesn't go on) in elective programs. While this concern is theoretically peripheral to the curriculum process, in this current Age of Suspicion English teachers must give it consideration. Further, all things taken into account, it appears that some, if not many, of the parental concerns are valid, even though they are sometimes phrased inarticulately. Parents are suspicious of the process of choice: "My kid isn't old enough to choose wisely. He'll just take easy courses." And we need to admit that our course-selection and counselling processes are not always effective. Parents are concerned about writing: "The colleges say kids

can't write, but the elective program is all literature." And we should acknowledge that we do overemphasize literature, and many of us just plain don't like to teach writing. Parents are concerned about courses that sound superficial: "The only English my kid had last year was free reading, sports literature, and detective thrillers. Whatever happened to Shakespeare?" And we need to recognize that in our zeal to motivate young people, we have occasionally become trivial or superficial or gimmicky in our teaching. If English is to regain support, its programs will have to answer (though not necessarily be distorted by) these public queries.

Electives helped to revolutionize English; they also have some inherent problems. What is needed, it seems to us, is a "second generation" of English programs, which will incorporate the successful features of electives, yet seek solutions to the obvious problems. Clearly, it would be a disaster to the profession if, five or ten or twenty years from now, we are still offering the same "old" electives in the same "old" pattern.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT:
A PROCESS FOR DESIGN

Every English curriculum needs to be tailored to fit the unique situations in a school and community. Nevertheless, there are some common elements of design which are applicable in diverse situations, and we'd like to sketch out a model curriculum to illustrate a process we think can be useful in developing the kinds of "second generation" English programs that the profession needs. Our process consists of three basic steps:

1. Assess the development, interests, and needs of the students. Determine where the kids are in terms of emotional, intellectual, and linguistic development. What do these junior or senior high school young people like to read/think/talk about? How sophisticated (or unsophisticated) are their language skills? What kinds of family backgrounds do they bring with them to school? What are their expectations for English? (It is time consuming to collect such information, but, we think, well worth the effort.)

2. Determine a general range of reading and writing activities appropriate for these students. Should they be reading juvenile literature or adult literature? Love stories or war stories, non-fiction or fiction? Are they better able to write haiku or limericks than term papers?

3. Select "clusters" of topics, units, or electives which lead to these activities. If juvenile literature is appropriate, what themes lend themselves most naturally to this kind of reading? If the students are ready for the writing of essays, what elective titles could be developed to foster expository writing?

What we are suggesting, in broad terms, is that having assessed students' interests, you can develop clusters of units or electives for particular grades or grade levels. Each cluster focuses on a common set of goals and activities, providing focus for a curriculum, while still offering students choices and providing possibilities for individualized experiences.
(Text continued on page six)

A MODEL CURRICULUM FOR ENGLISH

(Based on Developing Response to Literature)

STAGE/GRADE	UNITS/TOPICS/ELECTIVES	READING	COMPOSITION
I. UNCONSCIOUS DELIGHT (elementary grades, early junior high or middle school)		Wide reading and use of print and non-print media. Free reading, picture books, being read to, listening to recorded literature. Saturation. No pressure to discuss.	Equally free writing, storytelling, sharing, show and tell. Playing language games. Giving dictation.
II. VICARIOUS EXPERIENCE (lower junior high school) A. EXTENDING EXPERIENCE	The World Around Us, The Sea, Bridges, Sounds and Sights, Fire and Ice, Snakes, Hunting, Our Town, Sports, Animals, Faraway Places.	Fiction and non-fiction dealing with the natural world, with an emphasis on the exciting and adventuresome as well as things close to home.	Sensory writing, writing about observations, haiku poetry, personal narratives, keeping diaries.
B. FANTASY/ ADVENTURE/	Science Fiction, Ghouls and Goblins, High Adventure, Romance, Survival, The Supernatural, Unknown Worlds, Detectives.	Much fiction--action packed. Sci fi, detectives, mystery, adventure, horror. Hardy Boys stories, Nancy Drew, Alfred Hitchcock.	Writing of the same--tales of adventure, mystery, horror, intrigue.
III. SEEING ONESELF (upper junior high, lower senior high) A. LOOKING INWARD	Who Am I?, Coming of Age, Loneliness, I Have a Dream, Value Clarification, Autobiographies, Puzzles and Problems.	All genres: poetry, prose, essays, films, video dealing with identity. Especially stories by and about young people.	Personal and introspective writing: journals, diaries, personal narratives, contemplative poetry, personal poetry.
B. ONESELF AND OTHERS	Conflicts, Family Relationships, Rebellion, Friends and Enemies, Youth and Age, Making Connections.	As above with an emphasis on human relationships.	Introspective writing, with an increased emphasis on sharing thoughts in public. Group discussions, Interaction games and activities.

STAGE/GRADE	UNITS/TOPICS/ELECTIVES	READING	COMPOSITION
IV. PHILOSOPHICAL SPECULATIONS (upper senior high and beyond) A. ISSUES AND PROBLEMS	Cities in Decay, Man and Nature, Politics, Society Today, Minorities in America, Schooling/ Deschooling.	At this point the full range of literature--juvenile and adult--is available to students. Many opportunities exist for the teacher to move beyond "pure" literature into magazines, newspapers, and the like.	While private and personal writing remain important, students can move into a full range of public discourse, including creative essays, formal letters, discussion, debate, analysis, and "research" (not necessarily the term paper).
B. MORAL CONCERNS	Death and Dying, Decision-Making, Hero/Anti-Hero, Might and Right, War and Peace, Dissent, Love		
C. THE FUTURE	Dreams and Visions, How Old Will You Be in 2001?, Future Shock, Science Fiction, Utopias, Brave New World, Prophesy		
V. AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE (upper senior high and beyond) A. HISTORY	Civil War Literature, The Literature of the Twenties, The American Revolution, The Beat Poets, Protest Literature.	As appropriate to the subject.	The focus of composition will naturally tend to emphasize the analytical and critical--writing about writing. However, the thrust toward personal, introspective, and creative writing can and should continue, lest the program become strictly "academic."
B. GENRE	Literature of East and West, Poetry, Folklore, Canadian Literature, French Writers, Rock Literature, Russian Literature.	As appropriate to the subject.	
C. THEME	Existentialism, Politics in Literature, The Devil in Literature, Frontiers, Courage, The Young Person in Literature.	As appropriate to the subject.	

A MODEL CURRICULUM BASED ON DEVELOPING RESPONSES TO LITERATURE

In "Literature IS" (English Journal, February 1974), G. Robert Carlsen presented a description of several stages of growth in appreciation of literature, suggesting that as young people mature, their patterns of response develop and evolve. While his "stages" overlap to a considerable degree and are certainly not to be perceived as providing a rigid structure, they can serve as a useful, if general, model of young people's growth in English.

We have taken his five stages--Unconscious Delight (grades 3-7), Vicarious Experience (grades 7-9), Seeing Oneself (grades 9-11), Philosophical Speculations (grades 11-14) and Aesthetic Experience (grades 14-up) and used them as the basis of the model curriculum that appears on pages 4-5.

First, Carlsen talks of a stage of Unconscious Delight for children in the elementary grades. In those years kids read and read--voraciously, unconsciously, for sheer delight; no real "instruction" is needed as students revel in reading and being read to. It has been our experience that there is a parallel stage of "unconscious delight" in writing at that point, too, and thus our curriculum places heavy emphasis on "free" writing, informal oral activities, word play, and the like. If elementary teachers do a good job of exploiting the natural desire and curiosity of children of that age, fostering their unconscious delight in reading, writing, and living, they will create a firm foundation for the secondary school curriculum.

•Vicarious Experience is the next stage, coming generally in the early middle and junior high school years. At this point, kids become more conscious of the world around them; they seek a wide range of information and ideas. We have observed two ways in which this drive shapes reading and writing interests: First, there is a strong interest in narrative and descriptive materials--books about people, animals, places, things; second, there is a pull toward adventure and fantasy, which also provide students a source of vicarious experience.

Thus our topical or elective clusters include such subjects as "Sports," "Animals," "The Sea," and "Faraway Places" (to provide literature about the "real" world) and "Science Fiction," "Ghouls and Goblins," and "High Adventure" (to satisfy the need for fantasy reading). Writing activities naturally parallel, so our curriculum includes a good deal of storytelling, sensory writing, writing of tales of adventure, and so on.

•Seeing Oneself becomes a central concern for the upper junior high school and lower senior high school students. As they enter adolescence, young people are acutely self-conscious--they want to clarify their values, establish a sense of identity; they need to come to see themselves as OK. Thematic topics such as "Who Am I?," "Coming of Age," and "Loneliness" provide the teacher with ways of introducing literature that deals with these concerns, while such topics as "Conflicts," "Family Relationships," and "Rebellion" allow students to deal with their rapidly evolving personal relationships. All of these topics lend themselves to introspective and personal writing--journals, poetry, short fiction, personal narratives.

●Philosophical Speculations is perhaps a too-formal way of suggesting that as students reach the upper levels of the senior high school, their interests begin to expand outward, beyond themselves and their immediate circle of friends, to focus on broader philosophical and moral questions. Some electives can focus on current issues and problems: "Cities," "Man and Nature," "Politics," "Society Today." Other courses may emphasize moral issues and deal with the enduring questions of mankind: "Death and Dying," "Decision-Making," "Hero/Anti-Hero," "Might and Right." Students at this age are interested in speculating about the future as well, through such topics as "Dreams and Visions," "How Old Will You Be In 2001?," "Brave New World." Each of these courses provides the teacher an opportunity to bring in a wealth of literature, classic and contemporary, and, interestingly enough, the topics lend themselves to writing activities in the so-called "college prep" modes: exposition, criticism, research.

Finally, Aesthetic Experience becomes important for (some) students. Carlsen suggests that this happens at approximately grade 14; we're inclined to think it occurs with some upper level senior high school students. At this point, students become interested in literature for its own sake; they can begin to enjoy discussion of form and technique and genre as well as the "ideas" presented. While not all students will reach this stage, it is appropriate at that point to offer elective courses which focus principally on the aesthetic or structural aspects of literature, hopefully courses which take imaginative approaches to history, genre, and theme: "Civil War Literature," "The Literature of the Twenties," "Rock Literature," "Comic Literature," "The Devil in Literature," "Ethnic Consciousness in Literature," "Literature and Film." Once again one finds parallel writing activities, chiefly in the area of criticism, but by no means limited to critical essay.

We want to emphasize, once again, that this is a model curriculum, a hypothetical curriculum, designed to demonstrate the notion of topical clusters based on stages of growth. It might work in your school, but the best curriculum must evolve from the teachers' assessment of the "developing concerns" of the students they teach. Nevertheless, we want to point out what seem to us the basic advantages of the kind of curriculum we have created:

●It provides "sequence" and "structure" but does not become locked into rigid patterns.

●It is "student centered," rather than centered in the structure of the discipline.

●Nevertheless, it provides a comprehensive, intellectually valid "survey" of literature and offers opportunity for formal literary study for those students who need it.

●It presents students "choices" within clusters, thus drawing on that distinct advantage of elective programs.

●It includes provisions for a wide range of writing, including so-called "serious" or "college prep" writing. (We will devote part of THE INKWELL #10, "Writing Reintegrated," to this topic.)

●It allows one to talk to the public about the aims, goals, and accomplishments of the English program.

A CHECKLIST OF CONSIDERATIONS FOR CURRICULUM PLANNING AND DESIGN

We have offered the bare bones of a curriculum, a list of course titles. A good second generation curriculum will also move well beyond our outline to consider a number of issues and problems. Here is a checklist of what seem to us the more important:

( ) Stating objectives and rationale

( ) Student role in curriculum planning

( ) Using community resources

( ) Community expectations for its students

( ) Providing reasonable considerations for career and vocational education

( ) Assessing student needs and interests

( ) Developing a faculty rationale for the teaching of English

( ) Using teacher resources

( ) Reading and writing skills . . . within the context of the full English program

( ) Grades and grading

( ) Curriculum evaluation . . . for the benefit of the curriculum makers

( ) Peer tutoring

( ) The role of literature and composition in "life" . . . in lives

( ) Lunch hour

( ) Coping with the college preparation question

( ) Doing a reasonable job of college preparation

( ) Money

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